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ABSTRACT

Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP) is a self-development process designed to facilitate positive self-constructions and improved personal functioning. This study examined the effectiveness of DSAP interventions. Participants (N=30) were college graduates who had expressed a desire to improve their educational and career planning and decision-making skills. Participants completed the Adjective Check List (ACL) before and after the DSAP workshops. Results showed significant changes in the expected direction for all but one of the ACL scales. The second evaluation included career exploration clients (N=17) of students enrolled in a graduate career counseling course who completed a modified version of the DSAP. Four of seven ACL scales completed showed changes in the expected direction. The third evaluation included federal government employees (N=27) who particpated in a career planning workshop based on DSAP concepts. Participants described themselves as having more self-confidence. The fourth evaluation included teachers (N=22) enrolled in a summer course based on DSAP concepts designed to help them improve the motivation to achieve and the self-esteem of their students. Results showed teachers used a higher proportion of favorable adjectives and a lower proportion of unfavorable adjectives to describe themselves at the end of the course than at the beginning. In the final evaluation a comparison group of university students (N=33) in a course for prospective teachers completed the ACL on two occasions; the comparison group did not show significant changes in ACL scores. (ABL)

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This paper describes the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP), summarizes recent supporting research, presents the results of initial DSAP interventions by the University Of Washington Dependable Strengths Project (DSP), and states the direction of DSP work. In the fall of 1987, The Dependable Strengths Project was established in the College of Education of the University of Washington to continue the development of the DSAP and to evaluate its effectiveness in a variety of settings and formats for various populations.

Forster (1989), in a paper prepared for this convention discussing the rationale of the DSAP, describes it as a self-development process designed to facilitate positive self-constructions and improved personal functioning through a systematic intervention that enables participants to recognize, articulate, communicate and use their Dependable Strengths. Haldane (1989), in another paper prepared for this convention, discusses how the DSAP enables participants to use long past, recent and current good experiences of their lives to perceive positive life patterns. These positive self-perceptions enable them to focus on applying and developing their best skills, talents, traits and capabilities to expand their potential in ways that tend to ensure higher productivity, improved relationships, continued employment and reduced stress.

The DSAP has been developed by Dr. Bernard Haldane over a period of forty years; it is based on his personal experience working with clients and organizations rather than on a deliberately selected theoretical orientation (Haldane, 1988a, 1988b; Haldane & Haldane, 1984; Haldane, Haldane & Martin, 1980). Dependable Strengths are defined as:

> . . . skills, talents, and other qualities that have been developing over one's life, from childhood to the present, and which when used in combination enable one to do certain things well, with a sense of satisfaction and pride. It has been frequently demonstrated that such activities are low-stress ones. Each person can identify from six to about fifteen Dependable Strengths in a pattern that usually can be traced back to childhood. (p. 1)
>
> Haldane (1988b)

Dependable Strengths are positive personal constructions.

Although Dr. Haldane did not develop the DSAP from preselected psychological or educational theory, an analysis of DSAP procedures and techniques using the concepts of Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) indicates that the DSAP functions as a modification of the Rep Grid. The DSAP uses significant positive events (Good Experiences) in the lives of participants the same way that elements are used in a modified Rep Grid, and that a participant's past significant life events are used in Forster's Goals Articulation Process. The latter, however, uses both positive and negative past experiences (Forster, 1985).

The fundamental assumption underlying the DSAP is that the strengths upon which people can really depend are to be found in the positive experiences of their lives and in their feelings and beliefs (positive personal constructions) about these experiences. Recent research in the areas of cognitive and social psychology supports this assumption.

Taylor and Brown (1988) concluded from their review of recent research that most mentally healthy people employ a set of interrelated positive illusions. The term *illusion* implies a general pattern of bias or error, or both, that seem to be systematic, enduring and pervasive. They consistently found three positive illusions held by most mentally healthy people:

- Unrealistically positive self-evaluations,
- Exaggerated perceptions of control or mastery, and
- Unrealistic optimism.

Taylor and Brown acknowledge that their findings are at odds with the dominant theme that mentally healthy people accurately perceive reality, as found in the writings of theorists such as Vaillant (1977), Fromm (1955), Erikson (1950), and Maslow (1950). However, they point out that much of the work of these writers was based on the study of mentally ill people, whereas the current work of the cognitive and social psychologists upon which they (Taylor and Brown) base their conclusions was performed with mentally healthy people. Most mentally healthy people make very positive self-evaluations, strongly indicating that positive personality adjectives are more descriptive of them than negative adjectives (Greenwald, 1980; Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986).

In supporting related work, Kuiper, Olinger, MacDonald, & Shaw (1985) found that most people processed and recalled positive personality information much more efficiently and easily than negative personality information. Taylor and Brown (1988) suggest that many people's motivation, persistence, productive performance, and intellectually creative functioning may be enhanced by positive illusions. They acknowledge that the evidence is sparse in support of a contention that positive illusions directly facilitate creative intellective functioning; however, they make the assumption that positive illusions contribute to positive affect.

In turn, Isen and her associates have found that positive affect not only facilitates creative problem solving (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987), but it also facilitates the effective recall of positive information (Isen, Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978), the use of efficient problem-solving strategies (Isen & Means, 1983), and the establishment of a cognitively complex mental environment for the making of judgments and decisions (Isen & Daubman, 1984). Isen (1987), in her review of the research concerning positive affect, cognitive processes, and social behavior, found considerable evidence that positive affect is associated with decreased aggressiveness (Baron, 1984), increased cautiousness in threatening situations (Akers, Herren, & Isen, 1987; Isen & Geva, 1987), having a problem-solving perspective during negotiations and evaluating the negotiating situation and other participants positively (Carnevale & Isen, 1986), increased cooperativeness, sociability, and benevolence to both others and self (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1976), and high performance on tasks demanding innovation or creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987).

A major expectation of DSAP interventions is that the self-esteem of the participants will be enhanced. The importance of enhancing self-esteem has been emphasized by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem (Gelman, 1987). Chiu (1988) notes that although the construct of self-esteem is generally agreed to be the evaluative component of the self-concept, it has no accepted theoretical or operational definitions. Coopersmith (1981) defined the self-esteem construct as "an expression of approval or disapproval, indicating the extent to which a person believes himself or herself competent, successful, significant and worthy" (p. 1).

Markus and Wurf (1987) have noted that recent research leads to the conclusion that self-concept reflects not only current behavior, but more importantly, it is a major regulator and mediator of behavior and is capable of change. Gurney (1987) noted that self-esteem is generally considered to be a learned attitude, and like other attitudes, is open to change.

Bruner (1986) theorized that people appear to provide a sense of continuity in their self-concepts by constructing a current autobiography that harmoniously integrates their various experiences. The work of Greenwald (1980) and Ross and Conway (1986) indicated that the organization of this self-structure is highly flexible and malleable, enabling people to revise their personal histories frequently so as to uphold their present self-views.

Gurney (1987) in his review of self-esteem enhancement research with children found levels of self-esteem to be positively related to school achievement (Purkey, Grover & Zellner, 1970; Simon and Simon, 1975), increased acceptance of others (Suinn and Geiger, 1965), increased social effectiveness (Shrauger and Rosenberg, 1970), less defensive independent behavior (Rosenberg, 1965), and adjustment (Williams and Cole, 1969). Hauserman, et al.

(1976) and Felker and Thomas (1971) found that a substantial increase in positive self-referent verbal statements (PSRVS) resulted in a significant corresponding increase in self-esteem ratings; Gurney (1979) found evidence that the PSRVS self-esteem relationship persists over time.

Evidence that self-enhancing perceptions improve motivation for achievement is found in several studies. Felson (1984) found that positive self-perceptions were associated with working longer and harder on tasks; Baumeister, Hamilton, and Tice (1985) found that perseverance, in turn, produced increased performance effectiveness and probability of goal attainment. Vasta & Brockner (1979) found that people with high self-esteem evaluated their performance more positively than those with low self-esteem (even when the performance levels were the same). These perceptions of high performance may feed back to enhance motivation: McFarlin & Blascovich (1981) found that people with high self-esteem make higher predictions of future performance, even when past performance could not justify such predictions.

In summary, there is a considerable body of recent research that strongly suggests that the DSAP, with its strong emphasis on the development of positive personal constructions, will produce an increase in self-esteem, motivation to achieve, and more positive interpersonal behavior.

Method

Although the various DSAP group interventions conducted by the Dependable Strengths Project staff to date have differed in their details, all of them have included several fundamental steps; these are:

- A leader discusses the concept of Good Experiences; participants then share several recent Good Experiences in pairs. A Good Experience is defined as an accomplishment or an achievement that the person feels that he or she did well, enjoyed doing, and is proud of. Good Experiences are the basic building blocks of the process.
- Participants list about 20 Good Experiences from different parts of their lives going back to childhood.
- A leader demonstrates how a peer group can help a member identify potential Dependable Strengths through the sharing of high-priority Good Experiences and the discussion of how he or she made them happen.
- Participants share and discuss high-priority Good Experiences in groups of three to five, referred to as support teams, and help each other identify potential Dependable Strengths.

* Participants then discuss, analyze, compare, contrast, prioritize and test their potential Dependable Strengths until they have short lists of Dependable Strengths that have been key elements of several past Good Experiences and that they want to use in the future

* A leader makes a strong recommendation that the support teams continue to meet on a weekly basis until each member has completed the previous step.

Interventions and Results

Members of the DSP have conducted DSAP interventions with the following groups:

* University extension program students.
* Career exploration clients of graduate students enrolled in a graduate career counseling course.
* Participants in a Career Planning Workshop for government employees and spouses.
* Teachers enrolled in a course designed to enable them to help their students improve their self-esteem.
* Residents of a Job Corps Center.
* Students in a high school Career English course.

Three workshops were conducted for university extension students during the first phase of the project in the spring and summer of 1988. The participants were college graduates who had expressed a desire to improve their educational and career planning and decision-making skills. The three workshops followed the same basic format, although the number of contact hours and scheduling varied from one workshop to another.

Thirty participants completed the Adjective Check List (ACL) (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) before and after the workshops. The ACL consists of 300 adjectives that may be used to describe an individual. Five ACL scales were selected for their relevance to expected DSAP outcomes. The Self-Confidence scale is believed to be the most likely scale to detect changes in positive self-constructions. The Number of Favorable Items Checked and the Number of Unfavorable Items Checked scales are also thought to be sensitive to changes in self-esteem. The Achievement and Adult scales measure qualities encouraged by the DSAP and are thought to correlate with positive self-constructions and coping skills.

There were significant changes in the expected direction for all but one of the ACL scales; responses for the Unfavorable scale did not reflect a significant decrease from pre- to postintervention.

Since there were no significant differences in the measured outcomes of the three groups, the ACL results for these 30 participants are reported in Table 1 as a combined group.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and t-Values for Selected Adjective Check List Scales for Participants in University Extension Career Planning and Decision Making Workshops Before and After the Intervention (N = 30)

ACL Scale	Before Mn	Before S.D.	After Mn	After S.D.	t-value df = 29	p< Two-tailed
Favorables	45.8	16.2	52.1	13.0	3.96	0.001
Unfavorables	8.2	8.4	6.5	10.1	-1.6	ns
Self-Confidence	8.6	5.5	11.6	4.8	6.14	0.001
Achievement	11.5	6.7	13.9	5.3	3.6	0.001
Adult	6.4	6.4	8.8	5.8	4.3	0.001

The seventeen career exploration clients of students enrolled in a graduate career counseling course completed a modified version of the DSAP as part of a six-week career exploration and planning program offered through the Clinical Services and Research Center of the University of Washington College of Education. These clients completed the ACL at the beginning of the first weekly session and again at the beginning of the fifth session. During this four session period the participants also completed the Goals Review & Organizing Workbook (Forster, 1986), the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII), and the Self-Directed Search (SDS) in addition to completing the DSAP.

Seven ACL scales were selected because of their relevance to the DSAP goals and expectations: Number of Favorable Items Checked, Number of Unfavorable Items Checked, Achievement, Intraception, Autonomy, Self-Confidence, and Adult. Changes in the selected ACL scale scores are reported in Table 2, on the next page.

Table 2

Summary of ACL Mean Score Changes

Career Exploration Group (N=17)

ACL Scale	Mean Change	t-value df = 16	p< Two-tailed
Favorable Items Checked	+6.59	4.2	0.001
Unfavorable Items Checked	-2.29	1.46	ns
Achievement	+2.71	3.37	0.01
Intraception	+1.06	1.99	ns
Autonomy	+0.53	0.75	ns
Self-Confidence	+3.00	4.44	0.001
Adult	+3.65	3.14	0.01

Four of the ACL scales showed a significant change in the expected direction. However, it is readily acknowledged that these results are confounded by the concurrent use of the other procedures.

A two-day Career Planning workshop based on the DSAP concepts was conducted for a group of federal government employees (administrative, technician, and professional) and some spouses. The Adjective Check List was completed by most participants before and after the workshop.

Although the participants checked an average of 3.2 fewer adjectives after the workshop than they did before the workshop, this difference was not statistically significant; raw scale scores were therefore used for the analysis.

After the workshop the participants described themselves in more favorable terms, in fewer unfavorable terms, as having more self-confidence, and as having an increased concern for living up to socially commendable high performance criteria (Achievement scale). These results are summarized in Table 3 on the next page.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Selected Adjective Check List Scales for Career Planning Workshop Before and After the Intervention (N =27)

ACL Scale	Before Mn	Before S.D.	After Mn	After S.D.	t-value df = 26	p< Two-tailed
Favorable	49.6	13.4	52.4	14.0	2.15	0.05
Unfavorable	7.3	7.7	3.4	4.4	4.06	0.001
Achievement	11.0	6.7	14.0	5.8	4.48	0.001
Self-Confidence	8.8	6.4	10.5	5.6	2.61	0.05

Twenty-six K-12 teachers were enrolled in a University of Washington summer course designed to help them to improve the motivation to achieve and the self-esteem of their students. The course was primarily based on DSAP concepts; the format included two instructional hours per day for ten days, with outside reading and report writing. The first half of this course was devoted to lectures, discussions and exercises that enabled the teachers to experience the DSAP; in the second half of the course the teachers applied the concepts by facilitating the process with children ages 9 to 13, and discussed their facilitation experiences.

Twenty-two of the teachers completed the ACL during the first and last hours of the course. However, the mean for the total number of adjectives checked for the second ACL's (80.4) was significantly less than the mean for the total number of adjectives checked the first time (92.5), making the raw scale scores unusable as a measure of self-perception change during the course. A comparison of the ratios of scale scores to total adjectives checked between the precourse and postcourse ACL's was therefore used as a measure of the teachers' change of self-perception during the course. It was found that the teachers used a higher proportion of Favorable adjectives and a lower proportion of Unfavorable adjectives to describe themselves at the end of the course than they did at the beginning of the course. Results are presented in Table 4, on the next page.

Similar three-credit-hour courses for teachers are scheduled for Spring and Summer Quarters of 1989.

Table 4

Summary of the Changes of the Ratios of ACL Scale Scores to the Total Number of Adjectives Checked for Teachers Before and After a Course in How To Improve Student Self-Esteem (N = 22)

ACL Scale	Mean Ratio of Scale Scores to Total Adj Checked		t-value df=21	p< Two-tailed
	Pre	Post		
Favorable	0.51	0.55	3.309	0.0033
Unfavorable	0.06	0.04	3.342	0.0031
Other scales				ns

In an attempt to compare these exploratory results with the changes in ACL scale scores of individuals who had not participated in a DSAP intervention, a comparison group of 33 university students enrolled in a measurement and evaluation course for prospective teachers completed the ACL on two occasions during a period comparable to that of the workshops. The changes in scale score means for the selected ACL scales for the DSAP and the comparison groups are reported in Table 5, on the next page.

The comparison group results show no significant changes in the selected ACL scales. The comparison group, of course, does not meet the requirements of a control group; however, the lack of change in this group does demonstrate that the changes in the ACL scores of the DSAP intervention groups were not merely the result of retaking the ACL.

Two workshops were conducted for Job Corps residents in the fall of 1988. These workshops were designed to improve motivation to achieve and the self-esteem of disadvantaged youth and to enable them to take greater control of their lives. The theme was the development of effective problem solving, teamwork, and job-finding skills based on the knowledgeable use of Dependable Strengths. During a field trip on the last day of the workshops, 5 out of 15 participants who applied the workshop concepts with prospective employers in a nearby town were offered jobs in less than an hour. Postworkshop valuation is still in progress.

Recently, the Project helped a high school teacher integrate the DSAP concepts into a Career English Course conducted for of 10th through 12th grade students. Unlike previous DSAP interventions, the process was presented in one-hour-per-day sessions. Postcourse evaluation is now in progress.

Table 5

Summary of ACL Scale Score Mean Changes and t-Valuesfor the DSAP Intervention Groups and a Comparison Group

ACL Scale	Group	Change in Scale Score Means	t-value	p< Two-tailed
Favorables	Exten Students	+6.3	3.96	0.001
	Career Exp Clients	+6.6	4.2	0.001
	Career Planners	+2.8	2.15	0.05
	Teachers		3.31	0.003
	Comparison	-2.9	-1.6	ns
Unfavorables	Exten Students	-1.7	-1.6	ns
	Career Exp Clients	-2.3	-1.46	ns
	Career Planners	-3.9	-4.06	0.001
	Teachers		-3.34	0.003
	Comparison	-0.7	-1.9	ns
Self-Confidence	Exten Students	+3.0	6.14	0.001
	Career Exp Clients	+3.0	4.44	0.001
	Career Planners	+1.7	2.61	0.05
	Comparison	-0.1	-0.14	ns
Achievement	Exten Students	+2.4	3.6	0.001
	Career Exp Clients	+2.7	3.37	0.001
	Career Planners	+3.1	4.49	0.001
	Comparison	-0.5	-0.65	ns
Adult	Exten Students	+2.4	4.3	0.001
	Career Exp Clients	+3.7	3.14	0.01
	Comparison	+0.6	1.2	ns

Summary and Conclusions

Workshops conducted by the Dependable Strengths Project using several DSAP formats and with a variety of participants have demonstrated that this self-understanding process has a significantly positive impact on self-perception, self-confidence, motivation to achieve, and factors measured by the Adult scale of the ACL, such as adjustment, ambition and a sense of responsibility.

Applications

There are a number of areas in the career counseling field in which practical results of the DSAP are evident; the most significant of these include:

- Improved career decision making based on realistic self-knowledge that has been validated by other members of one's support team.
- Effective location of jobs that would more fully utilize one's strengths and skills by employing a Report of Capabilities that emphasizes a clearly stated summary of one's strengths.
- Preparation for job interviews through the development of concise statements of how one has effectually used his or her strengths.
- The negotiation of job content with coworkers and supervisors so that all concerned are able to do more of what they do well and enjoy doing. This skill is equally applicable to community, volunteer and home settings.

The Project has just begun to address the potential for the application of these concepts directly in the home and in the K-12 classroom for the improvement of the self-concept and self-esteem of children. The process would help them to focus on positive self-perceptions, to understand that they have their own set of strengths, and to gain an understanding and an acceptance of what their individual strengths are. It would also help them to understand that in our interdependent world different people having different sets of strengths is essential. To realize the full potential of these concepts, they should be applied in community settings, such as church youth groups, as well as in the classroom.

In our rapidly changing world, young people will need to identify those things that they do well and that they enjoy doing, rather than just choosing a specific career that may or may not continue in the same format. The recently published National Career Development Guidelines (National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, 1989) set forth a blueprint for the educational system to use in developing comprehensive career guidance and counseling programs. The goals are stated as competencies which each student should pursue; the DSAP concepts have a direct application as a means of helping children acquire them.

The highest priority competencies specified in the guidelines are concerned with:

- Knowledge and understanding of the importance/influence of positive self-concept on career development.
- Interpersonal and social skills required for positive interaction with others.
- Awareness/knowledge/understanding of the importance of the relationship of educational achievement to career opportunities.

The Dependable Strengths Project is now in the early stages of planning for the use of the DSAP with children, initially at the high school level, but eventually across the full K-12 spectrum, as a means of helping children develop these competencies.

Inquiries concerning the Dependable Strengths Project and its work may be addressed to:

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